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Mantle of the Expert as a means of developing creativity; the case of Efl (English as a foreign language) teaching in Greek primary school

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Abstract

Research findings in the educational field show that working within the setting of dramatic-inquiry based teaching approaches, such as Mantle of the Expert, develops students' creativity as regards new knowledge construction. At a first level, the present paper provides a thorough presentation of the theoretical framework and the fundamental elements underpinning the specific teaching approach. At a second level, the paper looks more closely at the conditions and situational factors that inhibit participants' creative behaviour in Efl learning in Greek primary school. It is strongly suggested that there is a direct relevance between developing creativity and applying Mantle of the Expert in Efl teaching. The paper concludes that the implementation of Mantle of the Expert has profound educational benefits with regard to:

- changing the dynamic of how new knowledge is constructed and used
- transforming the school classroom into a vibrant place of creativity
- fostering meaningful learning

Key words: dramatic-inquiry based approach, Mantle of the Expert, creativity, Efl learning

1. Concerns about creativity in education

Creativity is featured as "a fundamental life skill" (Craft, 1999, p.136), a highly valued human capacity in diverse fields such as education, arts, commerce, industry, business, culture. Many popular definitions of creativity rest upon the notion of "bringing something new into existence" (Gallagher, 2007, p. 1230)¹.

Grainger et al (2004, p.245) claim that it is worldwide felt that creativity in the educational field "has ceased to exist" and this in turn will inhibit societies from having creative citizens. The need for reinforcing creative experiences of learners in all educational sectors is recognized globally. This is evident in educational reforms carried around the world in an effort to provide conditions which promote creative growth. Recent research evidence² indicates that a positive learning environment, which encourages students' active engagement, independence and expression of opinions, constitutes a significant factor that supports students' creativity.

It is an undeniable fact that creativity has become the centerpiece of curriculum design and pedagogy globally in recent years (Wilson, 2005), for it is acknowledged as one of the most powerful motivators for real language use. As it is documented in Shaheen (2010), there has been a shift to educational policy in preschool, primary and secondary education worldwide, so as to include creativity in school curriculums. On a practical level, this means ensuring the appropriate learning conditions within the school setting for creativity to flourish. In order to achieve this, learners should be provided with authentic contexts which stimulate their creative imagination because in this way they experience learning situations for real.

Extending Halliwell's (1992, p. 11) relative argument that language "is a fundamental part of being human", we claim that a foreign language is a lot more than a school subject. It should not be conceived as a prepackaged set of information to be observed, analysed and used by learners. From our experience in the foreign language teaching field we know that children enjoy using their imagination. Therefore, it rests upon us, teachers, to use imagination creatively to children's advantage in the primary foreign language classroom. As Halliwell (1992, p.7) very well puts it, "The act of fantasising, of imagining, is very much an authentic part of being a child".

2. Deficiencies of the current Efl learning model in Greek state primary school

Young Efl learners enter the primary school classroom bringing already formed skills and features such as making creative use of limited language resources, using their imagination, learning indirectly. Mainstream Efl teaching practice in Greek state primary school does not facilitate the expression of students' emotions, interests and desires similar to the one that Paulo Freire (1968) regarded as effective. Learners are not provided with occasions for real language use. It is an unfortunate fact that they do not wish or dare to use the target language for their own purposes. They are deprived of the opportunity to make real language use in the classroom and thus "to make the language theirs" (Halliwell, 1992. p9). Moreover, Efl school course books have turned out to be rather ineffective towards that direction.

Recent findings of the evaluation of Greek compulsory education (IoEP, 2015) point towards the realization of lack of flexibility concerning students' educational needs and the necessity of Efl education targets adjustment to students' linguistic level so as to correspond efficiently to their learning needs. The evaluators' committee concluded that teaching English as a foreign language is grossly outdated and takes place in a socio-culturally heterogeneous learning environment which:

1. does not promote learners' experiential engagement in the educational procedure and collaborative discovery of knowledge
2. does not create genuine dynamic dialogic environments, which foster further development of linguistic skills and life skills
3. does not encourage the evolvment of students' creative potential
4. does not facilitate students' self expression

Since the aforementioned evaluation, Greek educational policy has embarked on the application of a new set of specific governmental suggestions for Efl curriculum restructuring. The renewed policy interest came about with the launch of a more student-centered Efl teaching approach in an endeavour, among other targets, to encourage students' creative behaviour in Efl learning in primary education. The Efl teacher is now called to design different curricula and implement teaching scenarios based on the students' educational needs and learning features. There has been a shift to the Efl teaching perspective from teaching English the target language just for exercises to working with it for real, as a language in use. So far, however, it has not been confirmed whether the latest conceived process has actually become more student-centered and whether it promotes students' active engagement in mindful, experiential learning activities inspired by the multicultural surroundings. This is corroborated by the lack of relative research evidence.

3. Theoretical framework of Mantle of the Expert

The Mantle of the Expert approach is a dramatic-inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning, invented and developed by pioneer drama educator Professor Dorothy Heathcote in the 1980s. The term refers to the concept of apprenticeship, which surrounds the student as a mantle (Aitken, 2013). It is about the ensemble of new qualitative features that the student acquires, such as elf-confidence, ethics, responsibility. These elements differentiate

the traditional relationship with the teacher (Heathcote, 2009), who becomes knowledge facilitator in this approach. In such an environment the student - teacher relationship becomes trustful and deeply dialogical.

Mantle of the Expert concerns the sociological - anthropological field of reality investigation and can be utilized as either a dramatic teaching method or a theatrical technique. In both cases Mantle of the Expert creates a dramatic environment, where participants are called to undertake expert roles across the whole spectrum of the social and historic development (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985).

As it is elaborated in Aitken (2013), Mantle of the Expert relies on three teaching modalities: inquiry learning, drama for learning and expert framing, which involves children being placed as adult experts (Graph 1).

Graph 1: The three teaching modalities of Mantle of the Expert

©Source: Aitken et al (2007)



In general terms, Mantle of the Expert creates an imaginary context, which simulates reality. Teacher and students undertake expert roles in order to create new understandings of what lies around them. There are six fundamental elements underpinning the specific teaching approach: experts, enterprise, fictional context, commission, client, tensions (Table 1).

Table 1: Fundamental elements of Mantle of the Expert

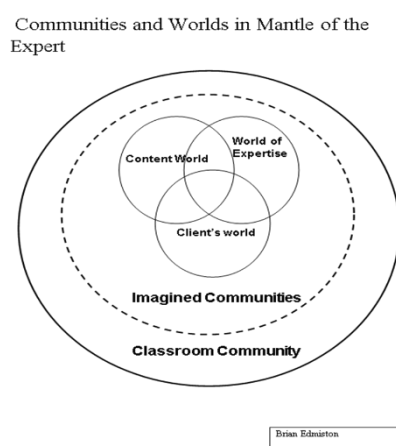
©Source: Heathcote & Bolton (1994)

1. Fictional context	Learners and teacher agree to operate in role in a fictional context.
2. Experts	Learners are framed with expertise as a fictional team.
3. Enterprise	A fictional company/responsible team with a common goal is set up.
4. Commission	A fictional task is assigned by an external agent to learners- as-experts which frames them with responsibility.
5. Client	The external agent, who is the final judge of the finished work, is usually a fictional prestigious person.
6. Tensions	Unexpected obstacles either naturally occurring or intentionally caused by the teacher hinder the progress of work.

Put it simply, Mantle of the Expert is about teachers and children acting as experts in an imaginary enterprise. In this fictional context the challenge is to ensure that the children have something to explore rather than receive. The context is set by the teacher in such a way so as to make sense to learners. Learners impersonate professionals who are very good at their job and master field knowledge. They undertake a commission with a contractual

element by an imaginary client through theatrical roles in order to carry out a research project. Throughout the project learners are required to show personal and social responsibility as far as running the enterprise in the fictional world is concerned. At some points various tensions arise on the learners' cognitive, emotional and intellectual level either naturally happening or intentionally caused by the teacher to keep learners engaged. In Mantle of the Expert children and teacher engage in activities in three different types of worlds: content world, world of expertise and client's world. Their interaction occurs in imagined communities which at the same time are framed within the classroom community (Graph 2). This means that children and teacher live the experience of being in role as they interact predominantly in role, but also out of role when necessary, depending on the progress of delivering the commission. As the teacher is now seen more like an enabler of knowledge and less as a transmitter of it, the teacher-learners relationship moves on to another level, as it becomes more trusting and dialogic. In Mantle of the Expert learning is situational and thus internalized and more meaningful compared to other current teaching practices. Instead of using the traditional teacher power-authority in demanding responses from learners, the teacher now designs situations for learners to develop dialogue.

Graph 2: Communities and worlds in Mantle of the Expert
 ©Source: Edmiston (in press)



The approach inverts the typical teacher-to-student teaching model in order to show how adults can work with children of any age and ability, using imaginative possibilities and conventions that are opened up through using drama, in order to develop deep and rich curriculum studies in classroom language communities (Edmiston, 2007). It re-frames teacher and learners in fictional roles in which they collaborate as experts in a specific field. The teacher is not only a responsible leader but also a guiding co-learner (Heikkinen 2005, McLauchlan & Winters 2014), a joint investigator. They are all colleagues in a collaborative learning arrangement with a shared sense of purpose and a set of values (Aitken, 2013). They work on carefully designed tasks from within the situations rather than learn about circumstances.

Task collaboration offers a kind of protection to learners. This safe frame deepens learning and awakens in teachers the significance of interaction with others in constructing one's identity. Students and teacher are engaged in structured improvisations which focus on collaborative discovery and problem solving (Aitken et al, 2007) and enable learning rather than explain information. This distinction is seminal to Mantle of the Expert mode of teaching and learning (Heathcote, 2010).

4. Creativity as a centerpiece of Efl educational practice through Mantle of the Expert

Creativity in learning environments has a long tradition of a 'making' or 'performing' practice for all participants engaged, regardless of the school subject content. It is strongly suggested that there is a direct relevance between developing creativity and applying Mantle of the Expert in teaching (Swanson, 2016).

Unlike the official Greek educational policy, which is still unaware of Mantle of the Expert, the specific theatrical method is included in the main theatrical-pedagogical approaches that are currently applied in the United Kingdom, U.S.A, New Zealand. Scientific research data in all these places point out the pedagogic benefits of Mantle of the Expert in all educational factors across the school subjects of the curriculum (Swanson, 2016).

Recent research findings in the Greek primary educational field (Papadopoulos & Kosma, 2018) have provided evidence of the positive impact of Mantle of the Expert on Efl state primary school students. Their research data show that working within the setting of dramatic-inquiry based teaching approaches, such as Mantle of the Expert, develops students' creativity as regards new knowledge construction. Furthermore, it is ascertained that collaborative learning leads to optimal Efl learning outcomes and contributes to the development of student's thinking and socialization. Students come closer with one another as natural and dramatic characters. They are given the opportunity to interact and discuss with each other as co researchers in role and collaborate, setting particular targets and following particular steps. Working with Mantle of the Expert fosters the idea *learn now-use now* as opposed to current mainstream teaching practices which are grounded on the idea *learn now-use later*.

Teaching by means of theatrical methods such as Mantle of the Expert, enhances the quality of student engagement as it provides a safe imaginary context for problem solving learning situations. Lehtonen et al (2016) suggest in their study that the feeling of safety and comfort is of major importance for optimal creative learning. Mantle of the Expert builds a relationship of mutual trust between teacher and students, an essential element which should be taken into consideration when opting for successful student-centered learning (O'Toole, 1992).

5. A teaching scenario for the primary Efl classroom

In his book, Theatre Pedagogy, Papadopoulos (2010a) designates an organization model of the Mantle of the Expert method. (Table 2). The model comprises of ten working stages which focus on design, process and evaluation. In short, in the light of Piaget's (1962), Vygotsky's (1967) and Dewey's (1964) theories, teacher and students are actively involved as investigators in and out of role depending on the teaching scenario needs. As is the case with playing childhood games, they get engaged in situations on the basis of the imaginary setting and use plain objects as tools in order to explore and recreate concepts that differ from everyday ones. This makes it clear that both experiences of the imaginary context and learning outcomes are regarded as imaginary yet real at the same time (Beach et. al, 2010).

Table 2: Brief depiction of Mantle of the Expert evolvment stages

© Source: Papadopoulos, S. (2010a)

1) Field query
2) Issue specification
3) Signalizing topics
4) Defining experts' work
5) Introduction to the drama setting
6) Choosing topics for the experts' work

7) Data gathering
8) Data processing
9) Presenting experts' work
10) Evaluating experts' work

In the light of the above model and for further elaboration of the theoretical principles underpinning the approach, we suggest the following working stages for a scenario, which, in our perspective, is suitable for Efl students of either the fifth or the sixth primary school grade, entitled *Thracian Myths*. Although the scenario is directly associated to the topics of the relative Efl schoolbooks and target language functions to be taught at these particular school grades, it constitutes a mere indicative teaching proposal. The reason behind this is that in general terms, a teaching scenario comprises of its own working stages, which are dependent on class dynamics, available resources, students' age and experience as well as teacher's conceptualization of the Mantle of the Expert method (Taylor, 2016). To be more specific, it should be pointed out that the following working stages facilitate students' oral and written practice of present and past tenses, such as Simple Present, Present Continuous, Simple Past, Past Continuous, Past Perfect Simple, in the context of face-to-face meaningful interactions and tasks. Additionally, they contribute to students' vocabulary enrichment. On the grounds of our teaching experience so far, it is our firm belief that teacher's provision of digital audiovisual stimuli plays a decisive role in effective lesson planning of the scenario as well.

The working stages of our teaching proposal are as follows:

Stage 1 (Field query)

With the aid of the relevant digital audiovisual stimuli provided by the teacher, students and teacher embark on a reflective discussion about mythological figures of Thrace, during which students recall relevant knowledge and express their opinions.

Stage 2 (Issue specification)

The teacher presents and reads aloud to the class plenary a letter from the Archaeological Museum of Thrace (AMT). According to that letter, AMT assigns to the museum curators' company, which teacher and students have previously set up, the design and organization of a temporary exhibition of mythological figures of their area. Moreover, the museum assigns to the teacher the responsibility of a written report for the final outcome.

Stage 3 (Signalizing topics)

Teacher and students discuss and agree to undertake the task and signalize topics (heroes, demigods, rivers, etc).

Stage 4 (Defining experts' work)

Teacher presents and explains the tasks for each specialty as well as the roles and actions for Experts' teams (for instance, archaeologists, diggers, technicians).

Stage 5 (Introduction to the drama setting)

Students and teacher in role, wearing their professional tags, start working as experts.

Stage 6 (Choosing topics for experts' work)

Experts decide on topics on the basis of their role (for instance, reading inscriptions, writing myths based on the inscriptions).

Stage 7 (Data gathering)

Students as experts gather data using different resources with the teacher's help when necessary.

Stage 8 (Data processing)

Experts draw mythological figures and invent significant facts of the figures' everyday life. They get engaged in role playing, dramatization, theatrical games using the appropriate theatrical techniques (freeze frames, thought detection, character outline etc).

Stage 9 (Presenting experts' work)

Experts present their work to the class plenary. Teacher in role prepares the relevant written report with the Experts' help.

Stage 10 (Evaluating experts' work)

Teacher presents and reads aloud to the class plenary a letter from the AMT, by which the museum thanks the experts' company for their successful completion of the assigned task. Finally, students and teacher reflect on their Mantle of the Expert experience by means of inquiring and artistic activities (journals, interviews etc).

6. Concluding remarks

The important role of school towards developing creativity and self sufficiency has been ascertained by outstanding educators, such as Montessori, (1919), Dewey, (1956). It is our strong belief that the necessity of making creativity centerpiece of Efl educational practice is of major importance for primary school students due to their young age.

Educational researches which prove that human nature seeks motivation in direct pleasure, in what is interesting (Dewey 1956), lead us to the conclusion that Mantle of the Expert has profound educational benefits for Efl learners with regard to:

- changing the dynamic of how new knowledge is constructed and used
- transforming the school classroom into a vibrant place of creativity
- fostering meaningful learning
- creating dialogic learning environments which are fundamental to achieving optimal learning. In such environments education is less like a waiting room and more like a laboratory (Taylor 2006)
- enflaming children's imagination
- expanding the cognitive and emotional basis of social learning as it creates environments which promote the social nature of learning (Papadopoulos, 2010a)

Students are no longer passive recipients of new knowledge. They are actively engaged in the Efl teaching - learning process with excitement and will. They learn faster and comprehend deeper compared to traditional teacher-led teaching practice (Woolland, 2010), which focuses on knowledge acquisition.

Learning becomes more student-centered. Such a student-centered Efl learning environment is essential to achieving optimal learning which consists in developing student's competence in corresponding to actual communicative conditions. Additionally, when teaching material is directly related to real life, learning evolves into a pleasant, automatic and relatively easy process and new knowledge is stored for a longer period. Therefore, it becomes obvious that Mantle of the Expert as a dramatic collaborative teaching practice constitutes an effective and enjoyable alternative teaching approach to current mainstream Efl teaching practice in Greek primary education, which has difficulty in arousing students' excitement and stimulating their authentic interest in effective learning.

Notes

¹ for a more thorough inquiry see in Barron (1969), Weisberg (1986), Sternberg & Lubart (1995)

² see Fairweather & Cramond (2010), Craft et al. (2014)

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